USEFUL WEBSITES

British Waterways: www.waterscape.com

Scottish Canoe Association: www.canoescotland.com

British Canoe Union: www.bcu.org.uk

Visit Scotland: www.visitscotland.com

Great Glen Way: www.greatglenway.com

Scottish Youth Hostels Association: www.syha.org.uk

Maritime and Coastguard Agency: www.mcgo.gov.uk

Canoe licences are issued subject to the following conditions:-

- You agree to comply with navigation rules, relevant Acts, Byelaws and regulations, and to follow any of our lawful directions, spoken or written (including signs).
- Canoeists on the Canal must have appropriate personal protective and safety equipment.
- All canoes must be suitable for the conditions of the canal and lochs.
- Canoeists should be prepared to give way to all other craft on the Canal by keeping to the sides.
- For safety reasons shooting of canal weirs is not permitted.
- Licences are issued subject to the Caledonian Canal Byelaws, a copy of which may be inspected at the Caledonian Canal Office.
- British Waterways makes every effort to provide a safe environment for all its users, including canoeists but you are expected to behave responsibly and will be responsible for any damage or difficulty caused by you or the canoe because of anything you have carelessly done or not done.
- We recommend you have insurance sufficient to cover your use of the Canal and associated Lochs.

Although every care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of this information, British Waterways cannot accept responsibility for any error or omission.

Photographs kindly supplied by Ghyll Head Outdoor Education Centre and Inverness Canoe Club.

GREAT GLEN WAYS

SLIGHEAN A' GHLINN MHÒIR

British Waterways Scotland

CANOEING THE CALEDONIAN CANAL

Welcome! The Caledonian Canal offers an exciting and varied sea-to-sea challenge for the long distance canoeist alongside many opportunities for attractive day paddles.

This beautiful waterway, which was designed nearly 200 years ago by Thomas Telford, is 60 miles long and follows the length of the Great Glen from Corpach near Fort William in the west, to Clachnaharry near Inverness in the East, passing through some spectacular Highland scenery.

Of the canal's 60 miles, only 20 are in man-made canal cutting whilst the remaining 40 miles are formed by open lochs : Loch Lochy at 12 miles, Loch Oich at 5 miles and Loch Ness a huge 23 miles in length. The waters of the lochs are always cold and in a strong south westerly wind waves up to 1.5 m (5 feet) high can develop, particularly on Loch Ness.

Because of the challenges that canoeists may face on the lochs, we recommend that paddlers are experienced in long distance or open water canoeing and plan their journey carefully. Those new to canoeing are advised to seek the guidance of more experienced paddlers or specialist instructors.

This leaflet,which has been designed with input from the Inverness Canoe Club, Ghyll Head Outdoor Education Centre and the Scottish Canoe Association, aims to provide all the information a canoeist might need to paddle the Caledonian Canal safely and enjoyably.

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT US

The Caledonian Canal is operated and maintained by British Waterways, a public corporation that cares for the 2,000 miles of canals and rivers in Scotland, England and Wales. Our role is to ensure that the inland waterways can be used for all to enjoy, now and for many years to come.

LICENCES

To assist us in our duties to our users, we ask all canoeists to collect a free of charge licence before using the canal. This means we can ensure that everyone has received a copy of this leaflet and understands the safety requirements for what is a less-than-ordinary waterway. Importantly it also allows us to track the number of canoeists using the canal, enabling us to target funding applications to provide improved facilities!

Licences can be obtained from the main canal office:
British Waterways, Seaport Marina, Muirtown Wharf, Inverness, IV3 5LE
Telephone : 01463 725500, or from either of the sea locks. Along with your licence, you will also receive a Skipper's Guide chart, which has details of all the locks and bridges and where to find our toilet / shower blocks, pubs, chandleries etc

You'll also be given a key for accessing our toilet / shower blocks. This key should be returned at the end of your visit. Alternatively, if you would like to keep a key permanently, one can be purchased for £7.00, and this includes a floating keyring.

Finally, we prefer canoeists to call at one of the sea locks or speak to one of our lock keepers before 'hitting the water' so that we can make other boaters aware that they will meet paddlers on their transit through the Glen. Other canal users include novice boaters in hire craft and skippers of large sea-going vessels and it can be very useful to remind them that canoeists are around!

AND WE'RE OFF!

To really enjoy the magnificent scenery of the Great Glen we recommend that you allow at least 4 days to make the complete passage. Bear in mind that it will take longer than you expect if you are canoeing into the wind. The prevailing wind is south westerly, but it can and does blow from the east at times! And lastly, before you set off, remember to cover any cuts or grazes to guard against the risk of water-borne diseases and maintain good levels of hygiene whilst on your trip.

LOCKS

In the interests of safety canoes are not allowed to use the locks on the canal. Each lock chamber is 8.5m (28 feet) deep from the top of the coping stones and has powerful hydraulic sluices in both the top and bottom gates. When these sluices are open a huge amount of water rushes through and much turbulence is created. For this reason we advise canoeists to stay well clear of the lock gates.

This means that it is necessary to portage around each of the locks and lock flights - it is advisable to pack a stowable trolley to help transport the canoes.

In most instances larger/ loaded canoes can be pulled through on ropes but this may not be possible at every lock and can depend on how much traffic is on the canal. Please seek the advice of the local lock keepers.

The diagram overleaf shows the position of the locks. If you are intending to travel from Fort William to Inverness or vice versa rather than from sea to sea we recommend you start and finish your journey at the top of the lock flights at Banavie and Muirtown to avoid the additional portages!

BRIDGES

All the bridges on the canal have adequate headroom for canoeists. Please check with the local lock keeper before passing under Muirtown Bridge as water levels and clearance may vary.

LOCHS

As large expanses of open water, the lochs that form two thirds of the Caledonian Canal, can be formidable paddling challenges and are not to be approached lightly. The waters of Lochs Ness and Lochy are rarely warmer than 4 °C, and strong winds or dense fog can make navigation inadvisable for larger boats, let alone canoes and kayaks. Canoeists should take preparation seriously by ensuring that they have adequate personal protective and safety equipment, heeding the local weather forecasts and ensuring their canoe and level of experience is of a suitable standard for the conditions. Due to the exposed nature of Loch Ness the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) has a coastguard service covering its waters, including a Rescue Boat and VHF CH 16 coverage. They recommend that canoeists contact them in advance of their journey, giving an emergency plan and contact details.

Please remember that the lochs are privately owned. Access to and from the water may occasionally lead directly to someone's private house - this particularly applies on Loch Ness in the Temple Pier area of Drumnadrochit. Please be aware of your responsibilities under the new Access Code **www.outdooraccess-scotland.com**

OTHER CRAFT ON THE CANAL

As we mentioned in the section on licences, the canal is used by a variety of craft including yachts, motor cruisers, large fishing boats and passenger trip boats.

As a canoeist you are expected to give way to all other craft. Please move to the side of the canal because larger vessels need to stay in the middle where there is adequate depth for them.

Don't assume that the helmsman of the larger craft has seen you and it's worth bearing in mind that many of the cabin cruisers are holiday hire boats and may have inexperienced crews aboard.

Keep to the side of the Canal when approaching bends or bridges - you never know what will be coming the other way!

We recommend that you talk to the lock keepers as you travel along the canal. They are happy to advise you of any large craft that you may meet and will also be able to tell the next lock or bridge to expect you.

SWIMMING

Please do not swim in the canal. It's dangerous and very cold - you could get entangled in weed, be hit by a passing boat or be drawn into the powerful sluices at a lock gate. The result could be fatal.

PARKING

Limited free of charge parking is available at Corpach Sea Lock wharf (near Fort William) and Seaport Marina (near Inverness). Please speak to local staff before parking your vehicle and/or trailer so that they can advise you where best to leave them. Parking in Fort Augustus is in the Highland Council car park in the village - it has pay and display ticket machines.

GROUPS, CHARITY CANOE MARATHONS & OTHER EVENTS

Organised groups are very welcome on the canal but it is the responsibility of organisers to ensure that there is adequate supervision and that group leaders are suitably qualified. Safety must be uppermost in everyone's minds; in some cases safety back up boats may be required on the lochs, particularly for canoe marathons or events that involve children.

We class a group as any party using 6 or more canoes at one time. At these numbers, navigation of the man-made stretches of canal requires more co-ordination between paddlers, British Waterways staff and other boaters. To assist us with this co-ordination and to ensure that appropriate safety measures have been taken, we request group organisers to contact us well in advance of the planned visit, so that we can take relevant information. Our contact details are:

British Waterways
Seaport Marina,
Muirtown Wharf,
Inverness IV3 5LE,

email
enquiries.scotland@britishwaterways.co.uk
or phone 01463 725500.

For events on Loch Ness, the MCA request that they also be contacted so that they can take details of arrangements. Their phone number is 01463 220577 (Inverness).
24 hour contacts : Aberdeen Coastguard 01224 592334 and Clyde Coastguard 01294 469213.

THE CALEDONIAN CANAL

ACCOMMODATION AND CAMPING

There are SYHA Youth Hostels at Loch Lochy and Loch Ness as well as various camping or caravan sites, hotels and British Waterways toilet /shower blocks along the route. Further information about accommodation and facilities along the Great Glen can be found on the Great Glen Way website www.greatglenway.com or by visiting the VisitScotland website at www.visitscotland.com

FORT AUGUSTUS

CLACHNAHARRY
Rail Swing Bridge
Muirtown Locks
SEAPORT MARINA, MUIRTOWN
INVERNESS
Bught Municipal Campsite
Swing Bridge
TOMNAHURICH
DOCHGARROCH
ABRIACHAN
CLANSMAN HOTEL
DORES
DRUMNADROCHIT HARBOUR
LOCH NESS
Urquhart Castle
FOYERS
Shop & Tearoom (1.5M from Foyers pier)
LOCH NESS
Swing Bridge
KYTRA
CULLOCHY
ABERCHALDER BRIDGE
Swing Bridge
LOCH OICH
Swing Bridge
LAGGAN
Laggan Locks
LOCH LOCHY
Letterfinlay Lodge - bar meals & showers – 01397 712622
Corriegour Lodge - "Taste of Scotland" – 01397 712685
GAIRLOCHY
Swing Bridge
LOY
MOY
Swing Bridge
MUIRSHEARLICH
CORPACH
BANAVIE
Swing Bridges

N

Many canoeists choose the option of a fully 'outdoors' experience on their visit to the canal and choose to 'wild' camp overnight along the waterway. We welcome responsible wild camping and have made some suggestions for suitable sites, below:

MOY BRIDGE West Side

April - October; During canal opening hours

GAIRLOCHY East of lock keeper's cabin, by picnic area

Toilets & showers due to open late Summer '07

LAGGAN LOCKS South shore

ABERCHALDER BRIDGE South side

Apr-Oct; During canal opening hrs

KYTRA LOCK South side

No facilities

FORT AUGUSTUS Top lock; next to BW toilet shower block

FORT AUGUSTUS Bottom reach by Inveroich Pier

FORT AUGUSTUS Camp Site (commercial)

T: 01320 366618

Facilities as advertised

INVERNESS Camp Site (commercial)

T: 01463 236920

Facilities as advertised

SEAPORT MARINA Outside marina fences

British Waterways Scotland

For more local information contact Caledonian Canal Office: 01463 725500. For other British Waterways information visit www.waterscape.com, or www.britishwaterways.co.uk/scotland visit www.greatglenway.com for further information on accommodation and local services.